

## Remarks at Abigail Adams Elementary School in New York City June 16, 2000

*The President.* Thank you very much. I think we ought to give Mary Minnick another hand. She did a great job. [Applause] And I want to thank her, the other faculty members, the staff members of P.S. 131 and their families, and your principal, Walter O'Brien. Thank you for making us feel welcome today.

And I want to thank Zahra Mohamed and Andrew Wood, the covaledictorians of the sixth grade. They remind us of what this is all about. And you can see from the student cheers who has the votes here. [Laughter]

Chancellor Levy, thank you very much. Representative Lowey, Representative Meeks, Representative Crowley, thank you all for your leadership for this worthy cause. To all the local officials who are out there, but especially my long-time friend, the Queens borough president, Claire Schulman; Superintendent Michael Johnson; School Board President Bill Johnson. And I'd like to recognize Randi Weingarten again, the president of the United Federation of Teachers—the teachers are helping us so much here—along with Ed Malloy, the president of New York Building and Trades Union, and Denis Hughes, the president of the New York AFL-CIO. They're also trying to help us get our kids in world-class buildings.

Let me say to all of you, as so often happens when I get up to speak, everything that needs to be said has already been said. But I want to say a couple of things to put this in perspective from my point of view. First of all, I want to thank you. Thank you, New York; thank you, New York City; thank you, Queens, for being so good to me and to Al Gore, to Hillary and Tipper, for these last 8 years. Thank you for giving us the chance to serve.

For 7½ years now, we've worked hard to turn the economy around, to get the crime rate down, to help people move from welfare to work, to help people balance work and family, to clean up the environment as we grow the economy, to make this country one America across all these incredible racial and ethnic and religious and other lines that divide us, to make our country a force for peace and freedom around the world. And we're in good shape today. We're having the longest economic expan-

sion in our history. We have the lowest minority unemployment in our history. We're going to have 3 years of back-to-back surpluses for the first time in anybody's memory.

And here's the point I want to make. What are we going to do with these good times? I've got a simple question. What is it that you as citizens propose to do? I've done everything I could do to turn our country around, to build that bridge to the 21st century that all of us can walk across together, to leave our country in good shape so that you, the American people, could decide, what are you going to do for the future? And I think the answer is simple. Look at these kids here. Just look at them. Look at all the different ethnic groups they come from. Look at their different heritages. Look at the different countries their parents come from. This is America's future. This is America's future.

Now, if I had come to you 8 years ago and said, "In 5 years, we're going to have the largest number of kids in our schools in history, and we've got a lot of them in old buildings, a lot of them in overcrowded buildings, a lot of them in downright unsafe buildings, a lot of them in buildings that can't be hooked up to the Internet, and I want to do something about it," you might have said then, "Well, Mr. President, that's very nice, but the country is in too much trouble, and the Government is broke." But that's not true anymore. We have the money to give all our kids a world-class education. The only issue is, do we have the vision; do we have the will; do we have the compassion to give our children a world-class education?

Randi was telling me right before we came up here—and Chancellor Levy confirmed it—we've got a program now to put 100,000 more teachers out there for smaller classes in the early grades. We've only finished a third of it, and New York can't take any more. Queens certainly can't take any more because you don't have any classrooms to put the teachers in, in the smaller classes.

We've got a program now that would provide after-school programs for every kid who needs it in America, but if you don't have the facilities, where are they going to go to the programs?

The Vice President persuaded Congress to enact something called the E-rate, which allows you to have discounts at schools with a lot of poor kids in it so every child in America can afford to be in a classroom that's hooked up to the Internet. But if you don't have the space—and some schools can't even be wired for the Internet—so what good is the program?

Now, I am proud of the progress that's been made in education in this city, in this State, and in this Nation. But if we think that we're going to build the future of our dreams, making these kids go to school in places where they don't have computer labs, they don't have music rooms, they're suffocating, their buildings are being heated with coal, and their teachers are trying to teach 40 kids when they ought to be teaching 20, we're living in a dream world, and we need to do something about it to give them a better future.

Now, here's what I've tried to do for 2 years. This is the third year I've proposed this. I want the Congress to pass a bill that would provide tax breaks so that we could help communities build, from scratch, 6,000 schools. I want the Congress to pass money every year for the next 5 years so that every year we can do major repairs on 5,000 more schools every year. It's not very complicated. But what you have to understand is, we can afford it. We can afford it. It's just a question of whether we think it's important enough to do.

Now, Nita is for it. Greg is for it. Joe Crowley is for it. Charlie Rangel is for it. We even have a few Republicans for it. Representative Nancy Johnson from Connecticut is for it, and I thank Nancy Johnson. This ought to be a bipartisan issue. When the kids show up there at school, they don't have to put their party affiliation down. We just know they need an education. We don't care whether they're Republicans or Democrats or Greens or Reforms or no affiliation.

So I want to tell you that we have a bipartisan majority actually ready to pass the bill in the House of Representatives. So you might wonder: Well, this is a democracy; if a majority of the people want it and a majority of their elected representatives want it, where is the bill, and show me the money? [Laughter] Well, unfortunately, the people who control the rules and when bills come up don't want it. That's what this is about. We have not been able to persuade the leadership in the House and the Senate,

the other party, to bring this up in a way that will enable us to pass it.

What I want you to know—

*Audience member.* [Inaudible]

*The President.* That's not a bad idea, thank you. What I want you to know is that the leadership of the House is trying to keep these good people from having a vote on school construction. They don't want their Members to have to vote against it for the obvious reasons that you might notice, but they don't want it to pass.

We have too many bills where we've got a majority for it, like the Patients' Bill of Rights, that we can't get up. So I am asking you, by your voices today, over the media, to the American people, and every day from now on as long as the Congress is here, by your support for your Representatives to say, "Hey, we love this school, but it's not enough. And we love our kids, and you have our money. Spend it on their future. Spend it on their future."

Again, I say, this is not complicated. It's about political will and vision. And I want you to know, folks, I get really frustrated when Washington plays politics just because they think times are good and there are no consequences. But these kids will grow up before you know it.

My little girl just got home from college—going to be a senior next year. I remember when she was that size. It doesn't take long for a child to live a childhood. And we don't have a child to waste. And you've got all these dedicated teachers and all these dedicated parents and all these dedicated school people out there, and we keep trying to put them in smaller and smaller and smaller boxes. This is wrong.

Now, we have genuine philosophical differences over some things in Washington, but this shouldn't be a philosophical issue. Are we going to build these buildings or not? We've got the money. Some people say, let them do it at the local level. Well, you know as well as I do that we've got more kids in schools than ever before, but we've got a smaller percentage of property-tax payers with kids in schools than ever before, and it's hard, if not impossible, to raise the money to build and repair the schools only at the local level. The National Government has the resources. This is a limited program. These children deserve it.

So I implore you all, by your voices today, and every day, say, "Thank you, Nita Lowey.

*June 16 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000*

Thank you, Greg Meeks. Thank you, Joe Crowley. Thank you, Charlie Rangel. Congress, give our kids the future they deserve. The whole country's riding on it, we can afford it, and we owe it to them. And we'll be awful glad we did."

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:12 p.m. in the school courtyard. In his remarks, he referred to Mary Minnick, teacher, Abigail Adams Elementary School (Public School 131); Harold O. Levy, chancellor, New York City Public Schools; and Michael A. Johnson, district administrator, Community School District No. 29.

## Statement on Senate Action on Electronic Signatures Legislation

*June 16, 2000*

I am pleased that the Senate today adopted the electronic signatures conference report by an overwhelming bipartisan vote. I look forward to signing this important legislation into law as soon as possible.

This landmark legislation will ensure that consumer protections remain strong in the technology age. It will help create new rules of the road for America's hi-tech economy. E-commerce helps strengthen our economy by low-

ering inflation, raising productivity, and spurring new research and development. By marrying one of our oldest values—our commitment to consumer protection—with the newest technologies, we can achieve the full measure of the benefits that E-commerce has to offer.

My congratulations to the Democratic and Republican leaders of the conference committee for their hard work on this legislation.

## Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Deployment of United States Military Personnel as Part of the Kosovo International Security Force

*June 16, 2000*

*Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)*

In my report to the Congress of December 15, 1999, I provided information on the deployment of combat-equipped U.S. military personnel as the U.S. contribution to the NATO-led security force (KFOR) in Kosovo. Additional U.S. personnel are also deployed in countries in the region and serve as support for our forces in Kosovo. I am providing this supplemental report, consistent with the War Powers Resolution, to help ensure that the Congress is kept fully informed on continued U.S. contributions in support of peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo.

The U.N. Security Council authorized member states to establish the international security presence in Kosovo in U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244 of June 10, 1999, for an initial period of 12 months, to continue thereafter unless the Security Council decides otherwise. The mission of KFOR is to provide

a military presence in order to deter renewed hostilities; verify and, if necessary, enforce the terms of the Military Technical Agreement (MTA) between NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY); enforce the terms of the agreement of the former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to demilitarize and reintegrate itself into civil society; provide operational direction to the Kosovo Protection Corps; and maintain a safe and secure environment to facilitate the work of the U.N. Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) by providing, until UNMIK or appropriate local organizations assume these functions, for public safety and order and border monitoring.

Currently, the U.S. contribution to KFOR in Kosovo is approximately 7,500 U.S. military personnel. This number once again will decrease to approximately 6,000 U.S. military personnel when ongoing troop rotations are completed. In